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Agent Orange Bulletin

Inaugural Issue VA Structure For Herbicide Actions

The *Agent Orange Bulletin* has been established primarily to provide physicians and other medical staff charged with the responsibility of coordinating agent orange activities at VA installations with information regarding recent developments concerning herbicide orange and related matters. It also will be made available, on request, to other interested parties.

In addition to reporting highlights of meetings and hearings concerning herbicides, the *Bulletin* will carry reviews and analyses of studies, and will cite reference material from a number of sources.

Comments, criticisms and articles from physicians and other interested staff members are encouraged. Material should be sent to Donald Rosenblum (102), VA Central Office, Washington, D.C. 20420.

The *Bulletin* is prepared by the Office of the Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director for Environmental Medicine (102). Publication will be on a periodic basis, approximately every other month. The *Bulletin* is not directive in nature, nor does it have the force of law or regulation. It is intended, rather, as an unofficial means of communicating the new developments in this sensitive area.

Barclay M. Shepard, M.D., is Special Assistant to the CMD for Environmental Medicine



As one of the most complex issues ever to face the VA, the health related effects of herbicide exposure has been addressed in the agency through the formation of special panels and offices to assure full coordination and sharing of information among those involv-



Top VA officials discuss Agent Orange issue at congressional hearings, at the table from left: General Counsel Guy McMichael, Administrator Max Cleland, Chief Medical Director Donald Custis, and Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director Barclay Shepard

ed in research, medical care, legal and administrative aspects of the question.

The primary elements of the structure include an advisory committee (comprised of veteran representatives and scientists and physicians from the academic community and

various federal agencies), a Policy Coordinating Committee (made up of key individuals from within the VA Central Office) and the Office of Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director for Environmental Medicine.

See "VA Structure" page 3

Status Of Key Studies Noted

Progress on VA's epidemiological study of Vietnam veterans exposed to phenoxy herbicides has been delayed. The awarding of the contract was postponed because of some complex legal issues. The General Accounting Office is currently reviewing this matter. It is hoped that there will be a resolution within the next six weeks.

The epidemiological study

was mandated by the Veterans Health Programs Extension and Improvement Act of 1979, Public Law 96-151. The same legislation requires VA to conduct a comprehensive review and scientific analysis of the world literature covering the whole issue of the health effects of phenoxy herbicides and the toxicity of dioxins, including TCDD.

The VA has maintained an

on-going review of this literature and is aware of much of its content. However, in view of the large volume of the literature and technical complexity of the subject matter, this task will be accomplished by contract. A number of proposals were submitted and these have been reviewed by a panel of experts. It is hoped that the contract for this very important piece of work will be awarded in the near future.

Top Level Group Steers Interagency Effort

All federal activities concerning herbicide orange are monitored by a top level panel of physicians, scientists and administrators. The board, officially termed the Interagency Work Group to Study the Possible Long-Term Health Effects of Phenoxy Herbicides and Contaminants, was established by the White House in December 1979.

The Work Group oversees all federal research efforts in this

area, and is charged with reporting to the White House and the public the results and implications of this research. The Work Group also advises the President concerning the herbicide orange issue and coordinates the herbicide orange-related activities of the various federal agencies.

Joan Z. Bernstein, General Counsel of the Department of Health and Human Services, chairs the Work Group. It also

includes representatives of the VA (General Counsel Guy McMichael III and Dr. Barclay Shepard) and the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services.

Participating observers include representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Departments of Agriculture and Labor, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and

Congress' Office of Technology Assessment.

The Interagency Work Group, which meets on a monthly basis, utilizes the services of its Scientific Panel, chaired by Dr. John Moore, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, to review, analyze and comment on research activities already underway or being planned by federal agencies and non-federal research organizations.

Library Notes

(Library notes will be a regular feature of the Bulletin. It is intended to keep physicians informed of publications concerning herbicide orange and related subjects.)

"Acute human exposure to TCDD in Seveso, Italy." Reggiani, Journal of Toxicology and Environmental Health. January 1980; 6(1):27-43.

Individuals injured after exposure to chemicals that escaped in July 1976 from a reactor during the production of trichlorophenol have been repeatedly examined by a medical commission. Many exposed individuals suffered burn-like skin lesions and all but two recovered without residual effects. Chloracne occurred in twelve individuals, but it was mild and has since disappeared. Systemic functions were repeatedly evaluated in all cases and no evidence of residual visceral lesions was observed. Immunocapability was normal and chromosome aberrations were within the normal range.

"A mortality analysis of employees engaged in the manufacture of 2, 4, 5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid." Ott, Holder, and Olson. Journal of Occupational Medicine. January 1980; 22(1):47-50.

This study examined the mortality experience of 204 persons exposed to 2, 4, 5-T during its manufacture from 1950 to 1971. The length of employment in job

assignments within the process area ranged from less than one year to approximately ten years. Efforts to minimize 2, 3, 7, 8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD) contamination of the product resulted in nondetectable concentrations using a method of detection developed in 1966 that was sensitive to one part per million. Within the scope of this mortality survey, no adverse effects were observed with respect to occupational exposure to 2, 4, 5-T.

"The mortality experience of workers exposed to tetrachlorodibenzodioxin in a trichlorophenol process accident." Zack, Suskind. Journal of Occupational Medicine. January 1980; 22(1):11-4.

One hundred and twenty-one workers who developed chloracne as a result of an accident on March 8, 1949, at the Monsanto Company plant in Nitro, West Virginia were the subjects of this analysis. Because of the small size of the cohort and the relatively small number of deaths observed, the results cannot be considered conclusive. No apparent excess in total mortality or in deaths from malignant neoplasms or diseases of the circulatory system was observed in a group of workers with a high peak exposure to tetrachlorodibenzodioxin (TCDD) who were followed over a period of nearly thirty years.

Orange Pamphlets On Display

In June 1980, initial distribution of the pamphlet "Worried About Agent Orange?" was made to all VA medical centers, independent outpatient clinics and Vet Outreach Centers. Additional shipments were made in July.

The pamphlets should be displayed in prominent locations in admissions and ambulatory care entry areas. Based on projected and reported

usage at your facilities, additional printings will be initiated to ensure an adequate supply. A large number of pamphlets are still available in VA's Supply Depot.

A TWX to the Office of Special Assistant to the CMD (102) should be made when your supply nears depletion. Questions, suggestions, etc., regarding the pamphlet may be directed to Layne Drash (FTS 389-5413).

Agent Orange Registry Statistics

Agent Orange Examinations Reported (As of August 20, 1980)

Cumulative number of initial examinations - 29,953

Examinations performed during June/July - 7,090

Examinations scheduled for a future date - 4,254

Top 10 Stations

Minneapolis	- 4,170
Wilkes-Barre	- 970
Fargo	- 839
East Orange	- 769
Nashville	- 720
Wood	- 715
Allen Park	- 677
Baltimore	- 657
Buffalo	- 535
Wichita	- 502

Orange Film Nears Completion

A videotape on Agent Orange is in the final phases of production with a mid-December target completion date.

The program is designed for general audiences to supplement the information in the pamphlet "Worried About Agent Orange?" The videotape is being produced by the South Central Regional Medical Education Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, St.

Louis, Missouri. Upon completion, copies will be distributed to all VA health care facilities, regional offices, and Outreach Centers. Additional copies will be made available to a number of other interested groups including veterans services organizations.

A second videotape is being planned to help VA medical personnel understand some of the more scientific and medical aspects of the herbicide issue.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The VA Advisory Committee on Health-Related Effects of Herbicides was established in April 1979 to assemble and analyze the information which the VA needs to formulate appropriate medical policy and procedures in this area. The Committee has a fact-finding and advisory role and may on occasion recommend policy for consideration by the Agency.

The Committee meets quarterly at VA Central Office. Meetings were conducted on June 11, September 24, and December 12, 1979, and April 23, and August 6, 1980. The most recent meeting was held on November 6, 1980.

The Committee, formerly chaired by Paul A.L. Haber, M.D., Assistant Chief Medical Director for Professional Services, is now the responsibility of Barclay M. Shepard, M.D., Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director (102).

In addition to representatives from a number of veterans service organizations, the panel includes physicians and scientists from the Department of Defense, Center for Disease Control, Environmental Protection Agency, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and Department of Agriculture.

The academic community is represented on the Advisory

Committee by scientists from the University of Cincinnati's Institute of Environmental Health and the University of Texas' Department of Pharmacology. The Veterans Service Organizations represented include the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans and the National Veterans Task Force on Agent Orange.

The Advisory Committee is actively pursuing several significant issues, and has taken the following actions:

(1) Considered the various aspects of an epidemiological study of Vietnam veterans exposed to herbicide orange;

(2) Recommended that VA closely monitor epidemiological studies performed on other population groups exposed to the chemical component of herbicide orange in conjunction with agriculture and forest management as well as exposure resulting from industrial accidents;

(3) Discussed the effects of herbicide orange on the male reproductive system;

(4) Discussed the variables involved in attempting to define a threshold level of exposure to dioxin which might result in toxic effects in humans; and

(5) Explored the types of animal studies that might be performed in order to define the effects of human exposure to herbicide orange.

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO CMD

In April 1980, the Office of Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director for Environmental Medicine (102) was established to handle the increasing, heavy demands associated with the herbicide orange issue.

Barclay M. Shepard, M.D., was selected to serve in this position. His background includes Tufts University Medical School, where he received his M.D. in 1958, a residency in general surgery at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and specialty training in thoracic surgery at the Naval Hospital in St. Albans, New York.

During 1967-1968, he served in Vietnam aboard the U.S. Naval hospital ship REPOSE. He has served as a thoracic surgeon at a number of Naval Hospitals. Dr. Shepard completed his Navy career as Chief of Outpatient Services at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, and has been with the VA since September of last year.

Dr. Shepard is a Diplomate of the American Board of Surgery, the American Board of Thoracic Surgery and is a member of the American College of Surgeons, the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, the American Medical Association

and the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States.

In his capacity as Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director, Dr. Shepard serves as Chairman of the VA Advisory Committee on Health-Related Effects of Herbicides, and is a member of the VA Agent Orange Policy Coordinating Committee, White House Interagency Work Group and its Scientific Panel. He is also a member/coordinator of the Data Analysis Task Force.

The recently established office has the following responsibilities:

(1) Serves as special adviser to the Administrator and the Chief Medical Director on matters concerning the herbicide orange issue, (2) Recommends policy to the Policy Coordinating Committee, (3) Provides policy and guidance on Agent Orange issues to 180 VA medical facilities, (4) Directs the activities of the Advisory Committee, (5) Establishes liaison with other agencies and institutions, (6) Monitors various herbicide-related activities, and (7) Responds to a large volume of inquiries relating to the Agent Orange issue.

A small full-time staff has been assembled to assist Dr. Shepard in carrying out these assignments: Lawrence B. Hobson, M.D., Ph.D., Clinical Assistant; Layne Drash, Staff Assistant; Nancy Zanis, R.R.A., Medical Records Administrator; Donald Rosenblum, Program Analyst; Elaine Beuparlant, Secretary, and A. Frances Reed, Technical Assistant. Dr. Shepard and staff are located in rooms 846, 848, and 850, VA Central Office. They can be contacted at FTS 389-5412 or 5413. The correspondence symbol is (102); the organization chart appears as figure 1, on left.

See "VA Structure" page 4

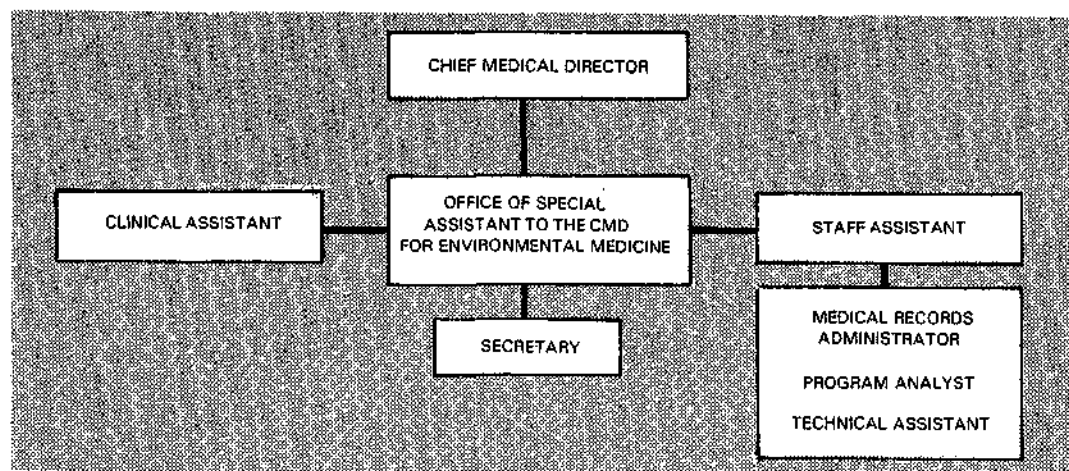


Figure 1

VA Structure For Herbicide Actions

POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

In May 1980, the Administrator established the Agent Orange Policy Coordinating Committee to function as the central coordinating point to review all aspects of the herbicide orange activities in the Agency and to develop and establish new policy in-

itiatives.

The group is chaired by General Counsel Guy McMichael, III, and includes officials from the Departments of Veterans Benefits and Medicine and Surgery, Information Services, the Office of Planning and Program Evalua-

tion, and the Office of General Counsel.

The Coordinating Committee generally oversees the activities of the Special Assistant to the Chief Medical Director for Environmental Medicine and maintains a close liaison with that office and the day-to-

day activities for which it is responsible. The relationship is one of mutual support in implementing policy developed by the Coordinating Committee and in carrying out the medical aspects of that policy by the Office of the Special Assistant.

Task Forces Focus Efforts

DATA ANALYSIS

A Data Analysis Task Force was established in June 1980 to assist in the evaluation of the information contained in the Agent Orange Registry. This group, chaired by William Page, Ph.D., Chief of the Biometrics Division in the VA Controller's Reports and Statistics Service, has been examining various aspects of the Registry in order to evaluate its current and future usefulness.

The Task Force currently is reviewing the available information and developing a data retrieval system which will provide a description of some of the health problems experienced by veterans enrolled in the Registry.

The Task Force, which meets biweekly, includes representatives from the Department of Medicine and Surgery, Office of Data Management and Telecommunications, and Office of the Controller.



Environmental Medicine Staff: Seated from left, Donald Rosenblum, Dr. Lawrence B. Hobson, Dr. Barclay M. Shepard, and Nancy Zanis; standing from left, A. Frances Reed, Elaine M. Beauparlant, and Layne Drash.

CHLORACNE

Chloracne has been widely accepted as one of the principal acute health effects resulting from exposure to chlorinated dioxins which include TCDD, the contaminant of 2, 4, 5-T. Recognizing that it is often difficult to distinguish between chloracne and other, more common forms of acne, the VA has established a special Chloracne Task Force. Dr. Kenneth Halprin, Chief of Dermatology at the Miami VAMC, chairs this group.

The Task Force, which consists of four dermatologists, is designing a protocol for chloracne examination and preparing special educational materials for the training of other dermatologists and environmental physicians. The Task Force is also identifying a larger group of dermatologists to serve as special consultants for positive identification of chloracne cases and assist in the adjudication of claims relating to such cases.

Recent Hearings/Meetings

September 10 Congressional Hearings on Agent Orange - Committee on Veterans Affairs, U.S. Senate

September 16 Congressional Hearings on Agent Orange - Subcommittee on Medical Facilities and Benefits, Committee on Veterans Affairs, House of Representatives

September 22 Public Meeting - Interagency Work Group to Study Possible Long-Term

Health Effects of Phenoxy Herbicides and Contaminants.

September 25 Congressional Hearings - Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives

November 6 Public Meeting - VA Advisory Committee on Health-Related Effects of Herbicides (VA Central Office)